

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN THE ASSESSMENT, PREVENTION, AND INTERVENTION OF CYBERBULLYING

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Many school-aged children have experienced the cruelty of bullying. The impact and effects of bullying have been described extensively in scholarly literature. Unfortunately, the impact of bullying has also made contemporary headlines with the recent rash of school shootings and other forms of school-based violence. The current body of students brings an additional threat to bullying. Due to their sophisticated use of technology, today's students are using contemporary delivery systems to taunt, tease, and threaten their classmates. Cyberbullying is the newest form of bullying, and it brings additional challenges for school personnel. Because of the unique aspects of cyberbullying, school psychologists need strategies to guide school communities faced with this threatening behavior. © 2008 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Technology is changing education globally. Networks and wireless communications are removing barriers and providing access to virtually limitless information and resources to students. Never before, in the history of education, have more students had access to so many resources. Clearly, technology is providing educators with advantages that will forever change the way we think about schools and learning. As educators embrace the options that open doors to new knowledge, it is important to address the range of negative issues that are threaded throughout the utilization of technology.

One concerning issue regarding the use of technology involves a contemporary twist on the long-standing abuse of bullying. Traditional bullying is defined as "systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt or psychological distress on one or more students" (The National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], 2003, p. 1). It is characterized as "repeated, negative acts committed by one or more children against another" (Limber & Nation, 1998, p. 1) and can take the form of physical, verbal, or nonverbal actions (Olweus, 1994). Bullying has long been a part of schools and schoolyards. As many as 30% of school-aged children either bully or are bullied (Nansel et al., 2001).

Technology has removed the schoolyard parameters from traditional bullying and expanded the problem to the borderless cyberworld. Cyberbullying is defined as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text" (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Due to the many formats of technology, cyberbullying can be inflicted through many different modes. Cyberbullies send photos, text messages, email, instant messages, and video through cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and computers. Technically savvy students deliver threats, send unflattering or incriminating photographs, harass, tease, belittle, or snub fellow classmates. Recent research has reported that cyberbullying is experienced by 20–35% of school-aged samples (Beran & Li, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; i-Safe National Assessment Center, 2006). Most frequent types of cyberbullying involve being excluded or disrespected through chat rooms, instant messaging, and email (Hinduja & Patchin, 2006a). Such action can result in students feeling angry, frustrated, or depressed (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007a).

Cyberbullying can be defined using the same descriptors of traditional bullying. Bully group, bully-victim group, and victim group can characterize the different types of behaviors associated with this form of intimidation (Limber, 2002). The bully group is characterized by the need to feel powerful and in control. Bullies gain satisfaction from hurting others and have a strong need to

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dominate. They defend their actions by stating that they were provoked by the victim, and generally target children who are loners. Bullies are aggressive with peers and adults, are likely to break school rules, and tend to come from homes where physical punishment is used (Limber, 2002). In cyberbullying, the bully group can be further subdivided into several categories. The “vengeful angels,” the “power hungry,” and “revenge of the nerds” describes those students, typically outliers, who are overtly intelligent (Aftab, 2007a). “Mean girls” is another fast growing subgroup of bullies. As their descriptor implies, they bond with each other to focus on others who are not part of their chosen group (Aftab, 2007a).

The bully-victims are those students who become bullies after being victimized (Li, 2006). This group tends to do poorly in school and exhibit behavioral problems. They are socially isolated and have few friends and poor relationships with classmates (Limber, 2002). Associated youth characteristics of cyberbully-victims include depressive symptomatology, problem behaviors, and being targets of traditional bullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). The victim group is characterized by low self-esteem and insecurity. They tend to be socially isolated, passive, physically weaker than the bully, and/or unpopular, and they might exhibit depressive symptoms. They often have overly protective parents whose interference has prevented the child from developing his or her own coping skills (Limber, 2002). Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying has negative psychological and emotional effects on its victims. Cyberbullying can place much strain on today’s youth, leaving them angry, frustrated, and depressed (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007a). Such strain can render the child or adolescent vulnerable and result in deviant coping behaviors.

Historically, school psychologists’ primary roles have involved three areas: assessment, consultation, and intervention (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel, 2006). School psychologists can engage in other activities such as evaluation, intervention, prevention, research and planning, and health care provision (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2005). In recent years, school psychologists have been proactive in addressing school violence, promoting safe schools, and providing mental health services in the schools. NASP recognizes that bullying and relational aggression are forms of school violence that can jeopardize the psychological and emotional well-being of children and adolescents and encourages school psychologists to take a leadership role in developing ways to reduce school violence (NASP, 2006). School psychologists have been actively involved in finding solutions to bullying and implementing bullying prevention programs, which is consistent with NASP’s seventh domain of professional practice: Prevention, Crisis Intervention, and Mental Health. In the literature, however, little attention has been given to the involvement of school psychologists in responding to cyberbullying (Cook, Williams, Guerra, & Tuthill, 2007). Clearly, responding to cyberbullying falls within the professional practice of school psychologists and needs to be a priority in the schools. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to define the role of school psychologists as change agents in addressing cyberbullying in schools and provide guidelines in awareness promotion, assessment, prevention, intervention, and policy-making development.

GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

School psychologists are in a unique position to have a vital role in addressing the problem of cyberbullying in the schools. First, they can be effective leaders in promoting awareness of cyberbullying and its psychological impact on children and adolescents. Second, school psychologists can assess for prevalence and severity of cyberbullying. Third, they can be effective in developing prevention programs designed to address the problem of cyberbullying among school-aged students. Another critical role that school psychologists have is intervention and planning strategies that schools can implement if cyberbullying becomes an issue. Finally, school psychologists would be vital team members in collaborating with school officials to develop policies regarding how cyberbullying will be managed in the schools.

Promoting Awareness of Cyberbullying

Awareness of cyberbullying and its impact on children and adolescents' emotional and psychological well-being is an important initial step for school psychologists to take to address the problem of cyberbullying. Awareness is the first step in prevention. It is important for parents and teachers to educate their children on the impact that online chats, instant messaging, text messaging, and social networking sites such as MySpace can have on their social lives. Research investigating technology use in youth indicate that 87% of U.S. children aged 12–17 use the internet daily and 45% own cell phones (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005). MySpace, a social networking site for tweens and teens is one of the most popular websites in the United States and reportedly surpassed 100 million users in August 2006 (Cashmore, 2006). Understanding the essential role that technology has in the social networking of children and adolescents will give parents and educators insight into the degree to which students rely on technology to socialize and the potential dangers that are associated with such behavior.

Hinduja and Patchin (2007a) have identified warning signs for both cyberbully victims and offenders. Such indicators are particularly important as more than half of children and adolescents do not report incidences of cyberbullying to their parents or other adults (i-Safe National Assessment Center, 2006). The cyberbully victim warning signs include the following: suddenly stops using the computer, appears anxious when an instant message or email appears on the computer screen, seems angry or depressed following use of the computer, appears uncomfortable about going to school or going outside in general, avoids talking about what he or she is doing on the computer, and becomes unusually withdrawn from friends and family members. The cyberbully offender warning signs include: quickly closes programs or switches screens when someone walks by, uses computer at all hours of the night, becomes abnormally upset if he or she cannot use the computer, laughs excessively while using the computer, avoids talking about what he or she is doing on the computer, and uses multiple online accounts or an account that is not his or her own. Promoting awareness of the problem of cyberbullying and the issues related to this unique form of bullying among teachers, school counselors, and school administrators would enable teachers to identify instances of victimization and pave the way for obtaining their support for future cyberbullying prevention programs in the school and development of a school-wide policy on cyberbullying.

There are various strategies including workshops, online training, informational brochures and pamphlets, and lesson plans on cyberbullying that the school psychologist can use with faculty and staff to promote awareness throughout the school. To make sure that all school personnel have a similar understanding of cyberbullying, an in-service workshop or a training session can be designed to include fundamentals such as the definition of cyberbullying, its prevalence among children and adolescents, the impact that it can have on students, the need to develop prevention and intervention programs, and the importance of developing a school policy. Current and research-based content about cyberbullying can be accessed from sources such as Hinduja and Patchin (2006a, 2006b) and the i-Safe National Assessment Center (2006).

It would be helpful to provide additional information that school personnel can access in addition to a formal workshop. WiredSafety.org (n.d.) has several lessons on internet safety and cyberbullying that include useful information for teachers, school counselors, and school administrators. These lessons can be effective tools for training school personnel with the added benefit that they can be viewed online, independently, and at the convenience of the educators.

Text resources provide handy references that teachers, administrators, and counselors can easily distribute to students and parents. Providing brochures on cyberbullying that are targeted toward educators or a written guide such as the *Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying: Addressing the Harm Caused by Online Social Cruelty* (Willard, 2007e) can be a useful resource for teachers, school counselors, and school administrators. This particular guide provides information on how

cyberbullying is defined, its impact on children and adolescents, reasons why persons are willing to say or do things on the internet that they are less likely to do in person, how educators can develop effective strategies to address cyberbullying, the legal concerns related to schools and cyberbullying, and how schools can develop a comprehensive approach to address cyberbullying (Willard, 2007e).

Throughout the school, certain faculty and staff have an ideal setting for raising student awareness of cyberbullying. Technology teachers and media specialists should emphasize ethical and security issues that surround the use of technology. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) that specify the technological expectations for students at various grade levels. One category of these standards that applies to cyberbullying is Digital Citizenship, which requires that "Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior" (ISTE, 2007, p. 1).

In addition to technology teachers and media specialists, school psychologists, school counselors, and teachers should collaborate to educate students about cyberbullying and internet safety. School psychologists can collaborate with teachers to design lessons around the topic of cyberbullying. These lesson plans can include classroom presentations, activities, and discussions about cyberbullying that the teachers can conduct or co-lead with other teachers and/or school counselors. The design of these lessons should include a definition of cyberbullying, the potential dangers associated with it, the consequences of cyberbullying for the victim and the offender, the importance of responsible internet use, and safe, responsible social online networking. Activities such as cyberbullying word find searches and puzzles (Hinduja & Patchin, 2005) can be included to actively engage students in a discussion about cyberbullying. An online resource that is engaging for students and provides information about cyberbullying is the online animation "Angels and Warriors" (WiredSafety.org, n.d.). Class projects such as designing a cyberbullying awareness brochure not only actively engage students in learning and discussing cyberbullying but has the potential for them to respond if they experience cyberbullying in the future or become aware of cyberbullying incidents that occur among their peers. A useful resource that school psychologists can provide to students is Cyberbullying NOT: Student Guide to Cyberbullying (Willard, 2007d). This resource provides information on the types of cyberbullying, ways to prevent cyberbullying, and what to do if cyberbullying occurs.

Parental involvement in the schools is critical to successful programs addressing problems or concerning issues involving students. Worthwhile content for parents can be found at the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use (2007) and West Regional Equity Network (2006). To promote parental awareness of cyberbullying, school psychologists can hold informational sessions at PTO meetings to introduce the topic of cyberbullying and the consequences that it can have on children. Parents should be informed that bullying in any form is not a rite of passage in childhood and that cyberbullying can have psychological effects on students. A brief overview of research that has been done on the extent of technology usage among tweens and teens as well as the impact of cyberbullying on children and adolescents would help to emphasize the significance of the problem of cyberbullying. To provide teachers, students, and parents with written material on the problem of cyberbullying, school psychologists can design an educational brochure on cyberbullying that is targeted for each group. In addition to providing information on what cyberbullying is, the prevalence of it, and the impact that it has on children, the brochure can also be used to share information about how to recognize warning signs of cyberbullying and how to respond if it is discovered that a child is involved in a cyberbullying experience.

Assessment of Cyberbullying

Assessment should be done within the school to determine the prevalence of cyberbullying. School psychologists can use a school survey to determine the prevalence of cyberbullying among

the students. Such surveys can be patterned after existing measures (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Willard, 2007a, 2007b). Answers to questions on a survey (including frequency of use of internet, chat rooms, text messaging, and instant messaging) would give an indication of how much time a student is using technology for social networking and thus, whether they might be at risk of future cyberbullying experiences. Questions related to direct experiences of cyberbullying can also be included to determine the prevalence of students in the schools who have experienced cyberbullying. Questions related to indirect experiences such as whether they know someone who is a cyberbully or who is being cyberbullied should also be included. A formal assessment survey, *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: The Student Needs Assessment Survey* (Willard 2007b), targets technology usage in students and the extent that cyberbullying is occurring in a school. This 30-item survey consists of questions focusing on demographic information; parental involvement; the degree to which students believe that online bullying is occurring; insight into the effectiveness of the school system's current policies on internet, PDA, and cell phone use; bystander response; knowledge about effective prevention and response to cyberbullying; and level of comfort in reporting online bullying incidences to adults (Willard, 2007b).

Online surveys or questionnaires targeted toward cyberbullying in older elementary and middle school students are available and may be a way of getting students to think about any online bullying activities that they have experienced. As an example, the *Cyberbullying Quiz* (WiredKids.org, n.d.) is designed to assess whether a student has been a victim of cyberbullying. Experiences such as finding out that passwords have been changed, being tricked into giving out a secret online, and finding out that secrets have been posted about him or her are included in this quiz. To assess for the prevalence of cyberbullies in the schools, the "Are You A Cyberbully" (Stop Bullying, n.d.) is a useful tool that targets behaviors such as using another person's screen name, teasing someone online, impersonating someone online, posting pictures of someone without their consent, and posting rude things online about someone. These assessments can increase students' awareness of what is and what is not acceptable online behavior.

An assessment of staff needs regarding cyberbullying is an effective means of determining useful information such as what teachers already know about cyberbullying, whether it is perceived as a significant concern for them and for the students, whether they have knowledge of it occurring in their school, whether there is an internet policy (and if so, its effectiveness). An example of a needs assessment survey for teachers is the *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Staff Needs Assessment Questions* (Willard, 2007a). This questionnaire assesses significant concerns such as whether cyberbullying is a concern for students in the schools, whether cyberbullying is occurring when using school computers, whether cyberbullying is occurring when students are using cell phones or other digital devices, whether students are posting online material that denigrates school staff members, and whether students are engaging in online gang activity. This questionnaire also addresses whether the district's internet use policy adequately addresses cyberbullying and the effectiveness the district's policy on cell phones and other digital devices.

In addition to paper-and-pencil measures, qualitative data from observations and student self-reports can be valid sources in the assessment of cyberbullying. Signs that have been identified include the following: becoming visibly angry or upset during or after internet use or cell phone use, withdrawing from friends or activities, decreasing in academic performance, avoiding school, having been a victim of traditional bullying at school, and/or appearing depressed or sad (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2007). Teachers and parents need to be aware of these signs and learn to recognize and assess for the presence of them. Such is imperative, given the observation that many cyberbullying victims are reluctant to report their experiences (i-Safe National Assessment Center, 2006).

It is important to realize that cyberbullying, and its assessment, are relatively new phenomena. As such, existing measures of cyberbullying prevalence and severity have not yet undergone rigorous

psychometric study. At a minimum, users need to examine survey items for clarity and face validity and make realistic judgments as to audience appropriateness. Such data, when combined with qualitative indices of the type just mentioned, may still provide a useful beginning.

Prevention

The first step in response to cyberbullying is to have a thoughtful and detailed prevention plan that should be based on the assessment findings conducted in the school. School psychologists can help schools develop an anti-cyberbullying prevention plan in coordination with other schools in the district so that all schools are consistent in their efforts to prevent cyberbullying. As with traditional bullying, students will do best if they receive consistent cyberbullying prevention training as they move through grade levels and change schools (Feinberg, 2003). School psychologists would be instrumental in establishing a committee to coordinate school-wide bullying and cyberbullying prevention activities. Schools that already have established anti-bullying programs will need to incorporate material addressing cyberbullying. Committee members would consist of school psychologists, counselors, and teachers. These members will need to be knowledgeable in issues that are unique to cyberbullying (Storm & Storm, 2005) such as:

- understanding the role of technology in students' lives and the various ways that cyberbullying occurs
- knowledge about the potential dangers of cyberbullying
- understanding that cyberbullies can be anonymous
- understanding that scope of cyberbullying is wider than traditional bullying and that it is more insidious, reaching the victim through multiple digital modalities and at any time of the day or night
- understanding that students may not report incidences of cyberbullying out of fear that they will not be allowed to use the internet or their cell phones or out of fear that reporting such incidences will lead to even more cyberbullying

Specific components of a cyberbullying prevention plan should include the following:

- the right for students to feel safe at school and home,
- definition of cyberbullying,
- how cyberbullying occurs,
- prevalence of cyberbullying,
- impact that cyberbullying has on victim and the cyberbully,
- understanding that electronic messages can be traced,
- the legal ramifications of cyberbullying,
- the need to take a stand against cyberbullying,
- the need for victims to report incidences of cyberbullying to adults,
- the need for bystanders to protest and report incidences of cyberbullying,
- the need to keep personal information private,
- internet safety and online etiquette rules, and
- the need to be respectful of others when using the internet and being responsible users of technology.

Students can be actively involved in the prevention efforts in the school. A mentoring system that involves a group of older students mentoring younger students about cyberbullying and responsible internet use can be established within schools (Media Awareness, 2006). The use of a mentoring group not only encourages students to be proactive in cyberbullying prevention but it also encourages leadership skills in students. Another way to engage students in the school's prevention efforts can include creating a school play that addresses themes of respect and inclusion and incorporates simulation to teach constructive responses to cyberbullying (Media Awareness, 2006).

School psychologists can engage parents in prevention efforts. Parents should be encouraged to keep computers in a common area of the home and talk to their children about internet safety, responsible technology use, what cyberbullying is, and how it affects their peers. In these discussions, parents should inform their children not to give out any private information and that they should not respond to cyberbullying messages or retaliate by sending a negative message back to the cyberbully. It is important that parents help their children understand the importance of telling an adult about any experiences of cyberbullying that occur and to save any cyberbullying messages that they have received.

In helping parents address the topic of cyberbullying with their children, school psychologists can inform parents of useful resources designed to foster communication about the topic. Hinduja, Patchin & Burgess-Proctor (2006) have developed scripts that parents can use to open the channel of communication with their children about cyberbullying. These scripts focus on how the internet and other forms of technology are used to communicate with their friends, problems associated with using the internet or other forms of technology, and, specifically, whether the child has experienced any cyberbullying. This would be a useful tool in developing a dialogue between the parent and child about cyberbullying. Another useful tool that school psychologists can provide to parents is a technology or internet contract that is signed by both the parent and child such as the one designed by Hinduja and Patchin (2007b). The contract lists expectations of the child and of the parent regarding internet use and internet safety. Additionally, the Parents Guide to Cyberbullying (Willard, 2007f) would be a useful resource for parents. It provides information about cyberbullying and ways to prevent their child from becoming either a cyberbully or cyberbullying victim.

Intervention

Although awareness promotion and prevention efforts can reduce the number of cyberbullying incidences, there is a strong likelihood that cyberbullying will still occur. A thoughtful intervention plan would allow for strategic, constructive responses to such situations. Without a working plan, actions taken by school officials might be reactive and mistake-prone. School psychologists should be actively involved in designing an intervention plan and providing intervention services in cases of cyberbullying.

Schools need to be prepared to deal with incidences of cyberbullying that occur among their students. School psychologists can support administrators in establishing a team whose purpose is to review any reports of cyberbullying. This team should consist of the principal, the school psychologist, the media specialist, and the school counselor. Schools should have an established procedure to follow when an incident of cyberbullying is reported. Willard (2007e) has identified school intervention strategies for cyberbullying directed at a student. These steps include the following:

- Save the evidence, which is particularly important if a legal response is needed.
- Conduct a threat assessment to determine if the report raises concerns about substantial disruption, violence, or suicide and contact law enforcement if the situation appears to be dangerous or if there are any threats of violence.

- Assess response options and determine appropriate responses.
- Identify the perpetrator by obtaining the assistance of technical services and be mindful that the perpetrator may be disguising himself/herself as someone else.
- Support the victim by ensuring the student and parents that the school will provide assistance and support and offer counseling and technical assistance if needed, and direct student's parents to outside resources, such as legal assistance or law enforcement.
- Provide guidance on how to remove or stop the cyberbullying, such as contacting the Internet Service Provider (ISP), forwarding messages to the ISP, and requesting that account be terminated; contact mobile phone service if cyberbullying occurs with cell phone use and have the number traced; use filtering or blocking functions for emails, instant messaging and cell phones; change the email address and phone numbers.
- Seek to use informal resolution strategies, such as contacting the parents of the perpetrator, offer counseling or mediation in the school, and seek to determine the underlying cause of the cyberbullying situation.

Besides providing intervention guidance for the school, school psychologists can provide intervention strategies for students. Students should be informed of these strategies prior to any experiences of cyberbullying so that they will know how to respond if they become a victim of cyberbullying. It is important that students understand that they should not retaliate if they receive a message from a cyberbully. By doing so, they might become a cyberbully and continue the cycle of online bullying and harassment. Students should be encouraged to save the message and report the incident to an adult. Some intervention actions for students include the "Stop, Block and Tell" strategy (Stop Cyberbullying, n.d.), which the child has been taught to do before responding to a cyberbullying message. Basically, this strategy consists of the student's taking time to stop and calm down rather than responding to a cyberbullying in an adverse way, blocking the cyberbully, limiting all communication on a buddy list, and telling a trusted adult.

School psychologists also can help victims of cyberbullying after an incident has occurred. Interviewing the victim to assess his or her emotional status can help determine if counseling is needed. It would be important to assess whether the victim feels safe at school or what can be done to help the student feel safe at school. Additionally, the school psychologist can meet with the victim's parents to inform them of potential signs of distress that their child may display and assist them in obtaining help from outside resources such as from mental health agencies or law enforcement if needed. Providing support for the victim and the parents will help ensure that the victim feels safe at school.

If the perpetrator has been identified, the school psychologist should interview him or her to determine what triggered his or her actions and whether the perpetrator still poses a potential threat. In their assessment of the situation, school psychologists may decide to speak to the cyberbully's parents to inform them of the consequences of their child's actions and to emphasize the need to monitor their child's internet activity.

School psychologists should provide parents with intervention strategies to use at home. Such strategies include setting age-appropriate guidelines for technology equipment, teaching their child not to give out private information, monitoring the use of internet at home, having computers in common rooms rather than the child's bedroom, and supervising the use of computers in the home. Parents also should watch for signs of possible cyberbullying and encourage their child to report any cyberbullying incidences that they have experienced (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2007). If their child discloses experiences of cyberbullying, the parent should inform the school, contact the ISP or cell phone service to attempt to identify the perpetrator, and block or filter any future messages. If the perpetrator is known, the parent might consider contacting the cyberbully's parents. Situations

that are dangerous or pose a threat to the child's safety or the safety of the school should be reported to law enforcement.

School Policy

Each of the areas previously discussed are important elements in the creation of a clear school policy on cyberbullying. Among other things, the policy should be clear about the role of the school psychologist (as well as other team members), giving authority to school psychologists to respond in situations involving cyberbullying.

If the school has a current bullying prevention and intervention program, cyberbullying material and policies will need to be included in this program. Schools are sometimes reluctant to become involved because cyberbullying can occur outside of school hours, off the school campus, and without the use of school computers. Legal issues and potential lawsuits regarding whether cyberbullying intervention is a violation of freedom of speech are concerns for schools. Attempting to determine the role that schools should play in intervention can be complicated. Some cyberbullying behaviors such as minor teasing would hardly warrant legal intervention whereas other forms such as harassment and stalking would fall under criminal legislation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007c). Determining the point at which cyberbullying behavior crosses the threshold for criminal or civil law is difficult. Based on a number of lawsuits described elsewhere (Willard, 2007c), the legal rights of schools have become more clear. Schools have legal rights to intervene in incidences of cyberbullying including those initiated off the school campus if there is evidence that the incident resulted in a substantial disruption of the school environment (Aftab, 2007b; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007c; Willard, 2007c).

Guidelines for establishing policies in schools have been suggested by researchers (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007c) and lawyers (Aftab, 2007b; Willard, 2007c). Schools should establish a committee to develop a policy based on the needs of the school. Committee members might include the school psychologist, the principal, school board lawyer, disciplinary officers, technology lab instructors, media specialists, a parent representative, and a student representative. School psychologists need to inform the committee of the need to establish a policy that includes a provision that states clearly that schools have the authority to intervene and can take appropriate action in cases involving dangerous behaviors by a student that directly impacts another student, the school itself, or its staff (Aftab, 2007b).

In developing a school-wide policy, it is important that school psychologists emphasize that the purpose of the policy is to protect students, staff, and the educational environment of the school and that the policy state clearly that cyberbullying is considered prohibited behavior. It is important that the policy address instances involving the use of the school's internet system as well as the use of personal cell phones, PDAs, and personal computers while on campus. It is equally imperative that the policy also address cyberbully activities occurring off-campus because such experiences can cause emotional harm to students that could lead to the victim's being a potential danger to him- or herself or to other students (Willard, 2007c). If the school fails to respond when the situation is at the "harmful speech" level, it may be at risk of having to later respond at the "school failure," "school violence," or "student suicide" level.

Knowledge of the legal standards that are specified by the courts governing in cases when school administrators respond to off-campus cases of cyberbullying is crucial for school psychologists in their work on developing cyberbullying policy. One such standard is the *Tinker Standard* in which schools cannot censor student expression unless it causes disruption in the school or violates another student's rights (1969). Under the *Tinker Standard* (1969), schools can respond when online speech "causes or threatens to cause, substantial and material disruption at school or interference with rights of students to be secure" (Willard, 2007c, p. 2). Willard (2007c) recommends that that *Tinker Standard* be incorporated into state legislation. Another legal standard, the *Hazelwood Standard*,

permits schools to impose educationally based limitations on student speech when students use personal digital devices in the classroom for instructional activities (Willard, 2007c). On-campus use of these devices, however, should be covered in the school's policy on bullying and harassment (Willard, 2007c).

The consequences of cyberbullying behaviors should be included in the policy as well as consent for the school to take action in situations involving behaviors that can have a negative effect on the safety of students, staff, and/or the educational environment. Having parents and students sign this contract ensures that they understand the consequences of cyberbullying behavior that results in placing student and staff safety at risk and having a negative impact on the educational environment.

An important component of an anti-cyberbullying policy should include the establishment of a prevention program and an annual assessment of such a program to determine its effectiveness. Additional components of an anti-cyberbullying policy have been identified by Hinduja and Patchin (2007c) and include the following:

- specific definitions of cyberbullying and harassment,
- graduated consequences and remedial actions,
- procedures for reporting,
- procedures for investigating,
- a clear statement that the students will be disciplined if his/her behavior (on or off campus) results in a considerable disruption of the educational environment, and
- procedures for educating students, teachers, staff, and parents about cyberbullying.

Having knowledge of specific state legislation regarding cyberbullying could aid school psychologists in developing a comprehensive policy on cyberbullying. Some states have already established legislation that addresses school policy on cyberbullying. The state of Washington has pending legislation on school policy that includes cyberbullying but limits the school's jurisdiction to cyberbullying that occurs on school grounds and during the school day, restricting the school from responding to off-campus cyberbullying involving its students. Similarly, South Carolina's Safe School Climate Act (South Carolina General Assembly, 2007) includes electronic acts of bullying and harassment but limits this to acts that occur at school, on school property (such as school buses), or at school-sponsored activities whether or not they are held on school premises.

Some states have been effective in obtaining jurisdiction for schools that expands beyond cyberbullying on school grounds. For example, Arkansas House Bill 1072 (now known as ACT115—"An Act to Define Bullying and to Include Cyberbullying in Public School District Antibullying Policies") was first introduced in January 2007. It states that every student in the state has the right to receive a public education in an educational environment that is free from substantial harassment, intimidation, harm, or threat of harm by another student. This act allows every school district to establish a policy on pupil harassment known as bullying and that cyberbullying be included in the policy. In this act, harassment through electronic means is included in the definition of bullying and school policy can extend to electronic acts "whether or not the electronic act originated on school property or with school equipment, if the electronic act is directed specifically at students or school personnel and maliciously intended for the purpose of disrupting school and has a high likelihood of succeeding in that purpose (Arkansas House Bill 1072, 2007).

SUMMARY

Cyberbullying is a new phenomenon that presents challenges for school personnel. School psychologists are in a position to have a role as change agents in addressing cyberbullying through

awareness promotion, assessment, prevention, intervention, and involvement in policy-making decisions. There are implications, however, that need to be considered. Taking a lead role in addressing cyberbullying adds to the workload of school psychologists who are often already overextended in the many responsibilities that they have such as assessment, consultation, crisis intervention, and counseling. Conceivably, this may add stress for school psychologists to balance all of their job duties. In contrast, school psychologists may be receptive to having an opportunity to practice “outside of the box” and welcome the prospect of having an impact on general education and special education students at a system level as well as one’s own designated school(s).

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